

Evaluation

Measuring Success from the Start

How do you know if your strategic environmental communications program is effective? That is, how can you be sure, as you design and implement the program, that it will have the desired impact on changing your key audiences' attitudes, beliefs, skills, knowledge, and/or actions?

Begin with the Results

Good evaluation begins during the communication program design and development. Clear statements of the program's objectives for success guide the evaluation process. Effective program design and evaluation are integral to each other. The program objectives can be operationalized into measurable objectives in the evaluation. Indicators can then be developed to measure progress toward each objective throughout the course of the program.

This fact sheet will guide you through the process of selecting an evaluator and will inform you about different types of evaluation processes so that you can discuss your program evaluation design with the evaluator.

Selecting an Evaluator

When selecting a consultant to develop and implement program evaluation, keep the following in mind:

- Ask about his/her credentials and experience in survey design, research design, and data analysis.
- Ask about his/her experience specifically evaluating communication programs and social marketing strategies.
- Bring your evaluators in at the beginning of the project. Let them help with the overall design and implementation of the program so that they can develop an effective means of evaluation.
- Clarify which behavior change tools might be used in your project.
- Clarify which type of behavior change or other results you expect to see as a result of the project.

Three Basic Research Designs

In order to know whether your strategic environmental communications project made an impact, you must either:

- Measure the status of the knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors you want to change both before and after your intervention, or
- Compare the targeted knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of your audience after your intervention with those of a demographically similar audience that was not exposed to your intervention.

If there is no comparison, there can be no evaluation. Simply measuring knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors after the intervention will not prove that there has been a change.

Three commonly used evaluation research designs are described below.

Before and After Studies

Before and after studies compare the same (or the same type of) study participants at two points in time that are separated by a period of program participation. One of the problems with this approach is that it is difficult to determine whether the program caused the measured change or whether the change was caused by other, external factors.

Before and After Studies with Experimental & Control Groups

This approach adds a control group to the before and after study. If an external factor influences all participants, it will show up in both the experimental and control groups. With this design, the actual study participants must be interviewed both before and after the intervention. The control group is also interviewed before and after the intervention, but members do not participate in the intervention.

Post-Program-Only Control Group Design

This design should only be used when baseline data have not been gathered or is not usable. This design interviews two groups at the conclusion of a program: one that was exposed to the program and one that was not.

Sources of Error

When interpreting your results, be aware of several possible sources of error that may influence the results of any evaluation:

- Uncontrollable external events can influence participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- If a long time elapses between pre- and post-interviews, participants may have significantly aged, gained experience and knowledge, lost interest, or dropped out of the activity.
- Finally, repeated testing using the same tools may allow research participants to "learn how to answer the questions," thereby invalidating results.

Information Needs and Evaluation Tools	
Data Collection	records, logs, journals, clicker counts of attendance
Program Quality	expert review, observation, staff self-analysis, staff performance
Participant Reaction	drawings, photographs, journals, logs, post-it boards, suggestion boxes, comment cards, testimonials, anecdotes, observation
Participant Knowledge and Behavior	surveys, interviews, concept maps, observation, artifacts, photographs, focus groups
Action Research	journals, tape-recorded sessions, observation, etc., to support participant reflection and analysis
Media Impact	phone, mail, or face-to-face surveys, count calls, visits
Materials Quality	readability tests, pre-tests, observation
Participant Involvement	participatory rapid appraisal techniques such as discussion groups, engineering models, mapping, sorting photographs, calendars, timelines, trend lines, ranking, pie charts, matrices

Use the Right Tools

Depending on what you want to evaluate (e.g., program quality, participant reaction, behavior change, media coverage), you can select from various measurement tools. The program manager and the evaluator should discuss how to match the tool to the need. The chart to the left lists common evaluation criteria and tools to measure them.

Creative Evaluation Approaches

Evaluation can be expensive. Ask your evaluator about creative cost-effective approaches such as:

- Conducting the baseline survey by "piggybacking" questions onto existing, ongoing research such as omnibus surveys conducted by the private sector or national government.
- Involving and training community members to measure change indicators. Being involved in this research also helps citizens seek, organize, and use data to make decisions. Around the world, community members are counting and identifying species to measure biodiversity, measuring water quality indicators in local streams, and using professionally developed checklists to measure progress toward land-use management.

Share the Results

Use good intermediate evaluation results to build support for your project among key decision makers, constituencies, partners, and donors. Use good final results to demonstrate success to the news media.

Sources

Alan R. Andreasen, *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

Brian A. Day, Martha C. Monroe, *Environmental Education & Communication For A Sustainable World: Handbook for International Practitioners* (Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, 2000).

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Strategic Participatory Communications



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